

MAY 21, 1976

THOUGHTS ON GISCARD D'ESTAING'S VISIT

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY HAS THESE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE VISIT TO WASHINGTON THIS WEEK OF FRENCH PRESIDENT VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING:

VOICE: PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING OF FRANCE WAS NOT IN WASHINGTON VERY LONG BEFORE HE LEFT TO VISIT OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. NOR IS THERE ANY PRECISE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT HE AND PRESIDENT FORD TALKED ABOUT. BUT FROM A PUBLIC-RELATIONS STANDPOINT---AND THAT WAS A PRIMARY ASPECT OF THE VISIT---IT WAS AN OBVIOUS SUCCESS. AT VARIOUS CEREMONIES, FRANCE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUCCESS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION WAS VIVIDLY RECALLED---AS WELL AS THE LONG-STANDING SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. AND IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS ABOUT FRENCH DETERMINATION TO REMAIN PART OF THE WESTERN DEFENSE EFFORT---THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY OF THE NATO MILITARY STRUCTURE---MAY WELL HAVE HELPED OVERCOME THE FEELING AMONG SOME AMERICANS THAT FRANCE WAS LESS OF AN ALLY THAN IN TIMES PAST. HE ALSO CAME OUT STRONGLY IN SUPPORT OF THE MUCH-DEBATED POLICY OF DETENTE---ALTHOUGH HE CAUTIONED THAT "OPTING FOR DETENTE IS THE OPPOSITE OF RELAXING OUR MORAL DEFENSES."

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING APPEARANCES THE FRENCH PRESIDENT MADE WHILE HERE WAS AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WHERE HE WAS QUESTIONED BY REPORTERS ON A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS. IT WAS THERE THAT THE SUBJECT OF THE MIDDLE EAST WAS RAISED, AND PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO CALL FOR NEW INITIATIVES TOWARD PEACE---INITIATIVES WHICH WOULD INVOLVE BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, AND

WOULD INCLUDE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. STRIKING A MOMENTARILY SOMBER NOTE, THE FRENCH PRESIDENT WARNED THAT TIME---AS HE PUT IT---WILL NOT IMPROVE THE CHANCES FOR PEACE. THE SOONER ACTION IS TAKEN THE BETTER, HE SAID, EVEN THOUGH HE REALIZES THAT NINETEEN SEVENTY-SIX POSES DIFFICULTIES BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL CONDITIONS "IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES." HE ALSO MADE IT CLEAR, IN ANSWER TO ANOTHER QUESTION, THAT FRANCE IS PROFOUNDLY INTERESTED IN LEBANON AND IS EVEN PREPARED---IF INVITED, AND UNDER THE RIGHT CONDITIONS---TO OFFER HELP IN MAINTAINING THE PEACE THERE.

GISCARD D'ESTAING'S VISIT DID NOT PRODUCE ANY DRAMATIC RESULTS OR NEW DEPARTURES IN FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS. EVEN THE AGENDA OF THE DISCUSSIONS WAS KEPT PRIVATE. ASIDE FROM THE PUBLIC CEREMONIES, IT WAS OBVIOUSLY A WORKING VISIT WHOSE GREATEST VALUE LAY IN THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BETTER OFFICIAL AND PERSONAL RELATIONS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL. IT WAS THE SECOND SUCH BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT FORD AND PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING, AND THE SECOND APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN JUST AS SUCCESSFUL AS THE FIRST.